



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 6 March 2022

Lent 1

As disciples of Christ we come to worship. Let us ask God to renew us in our worship.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"He was tempted by the devil."

Luke 4:2

An Illustration to set the scene

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Sunday is when Jesus' resurrection is commemorated.

Indeed, the Russian word for Sunday (pronounced "Voskresen'ye"), means "resurrection".

Sunday begins at Vespers on Saturday evening and runs until Vespers on Sunday.

During this time, the dismissal at all services begins with the words, "**May Christ our True God, who rose from the dead...**"

And because Sunday is considered a "**Little Easter**", the making of prostrations (*the practice of placing oneself in a reverentially or submissively prone position*) is forbidden on Sunday except in certain circumstances.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Jesus has just been baptised and he is about to start his messianic ministry.

He has been led by the Spirit into the wilderness, a place of preparation, fasting and prayer.

Luke and Matthew offer similar accounts of Jesus' fasting in the desert, whereas Mark simply gives us one verse. He does, however, highlight the temptations of Jesus as they appear throughout the Gospel story.

The style adopted by Luke opens up Jesus' inner world – his direct dialogue with the devil.

Scot McKnight, in his book ***Fasting***, draws a distinction between fasting and abstinence.

Abstinence is about giving up something – and it may be done in a variety of ways and for a range of reasons. (*One might, for example, decide to abstain from using certain language.*)

Fasting, Scot McKnight says, is always about food.

It is a bodily, enfleshed response to a grievous or sacred moment.

A forty-day fast such as Lent is our enfleshed response to Jesus' call to discipleship, just as his forty-day fast was an enfleshed response to the Father's call to messiahship.

The whole of Jesus' ministry will be accomplished very much in the body – in full union with the Spirit.

A forty-day fast is essential preparation.

We often ask one another, “***What are you giving up for Lent?***”

We treat Lent as a time of abstinence and discipline. But in the wilderness, Jesus undertakes an extreme fast.

During the fast, Jesus is tempted.

Luke gives three examples, and on each occasion Jesus draws strength and wisdom from the scriptures. His retreat into this place of spiritual knowledge is a little like our gathering for Sunday worship during Lent. These are moments of feeding and nurture before we return to the next leg of our forty-day fast.

1st The first temptation is an assault via the body, but it is also a deeper attack on Jesus’ self-identity. “***If you are the Son of God, why should you be suffering?***”

It is the fundamental question of Christology – *or what kind of saviour God provides*. But the very nature of Jesus’ mission is to join with humanity and to suffer for humanity, so that we can be rejoined to God.

2nd The second temptation is an assault on Jesus’ endurance. Here the devil offers a quick fix – a fast track to total domination.

But the nature of Jesus’ cross shows that there are no quick fixes. Jesus’ ministry will be painful and appear to end in total failure before he is finally exalted.

The endurance of a forty-day fast is both a symbolic and a practical preparation.

In both of these temptations, Jesus parries with the devil with simple scripture.

3rd But in the third temptation the devil uses scripture against him. It's as if he breaks right into Jesus' storehouse and steals his sustenance.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Following Jesus' example, Lent is a time for the renewal of discipleship.

Whether or not we engage in a fast or some kind of abstinence and discipline, we all face the temptation to give up, to cut corners – and sometimes we are simply caught out by that opponent whose aim is destruction.

Whatever tradition we follow, we can see Sunday as a day of resurrection. It pulls our gaze forward to look beyond the struggle, beyond the cross, and to the assurance of victory.

As a resurrection day, Sunday is a day of judgement, forgiveness, grace and renewal.

Our failures are dealt with and we begin again. But there is judgement on the devil and his works.

The Sundays in Lent, therefore, should be celebrated richly – not as excuses for excess, or with a sense of respite, but in order to nurture our spirits and draw from the well of grace.

"He was tempted by the devil."

Luke 4:2

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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